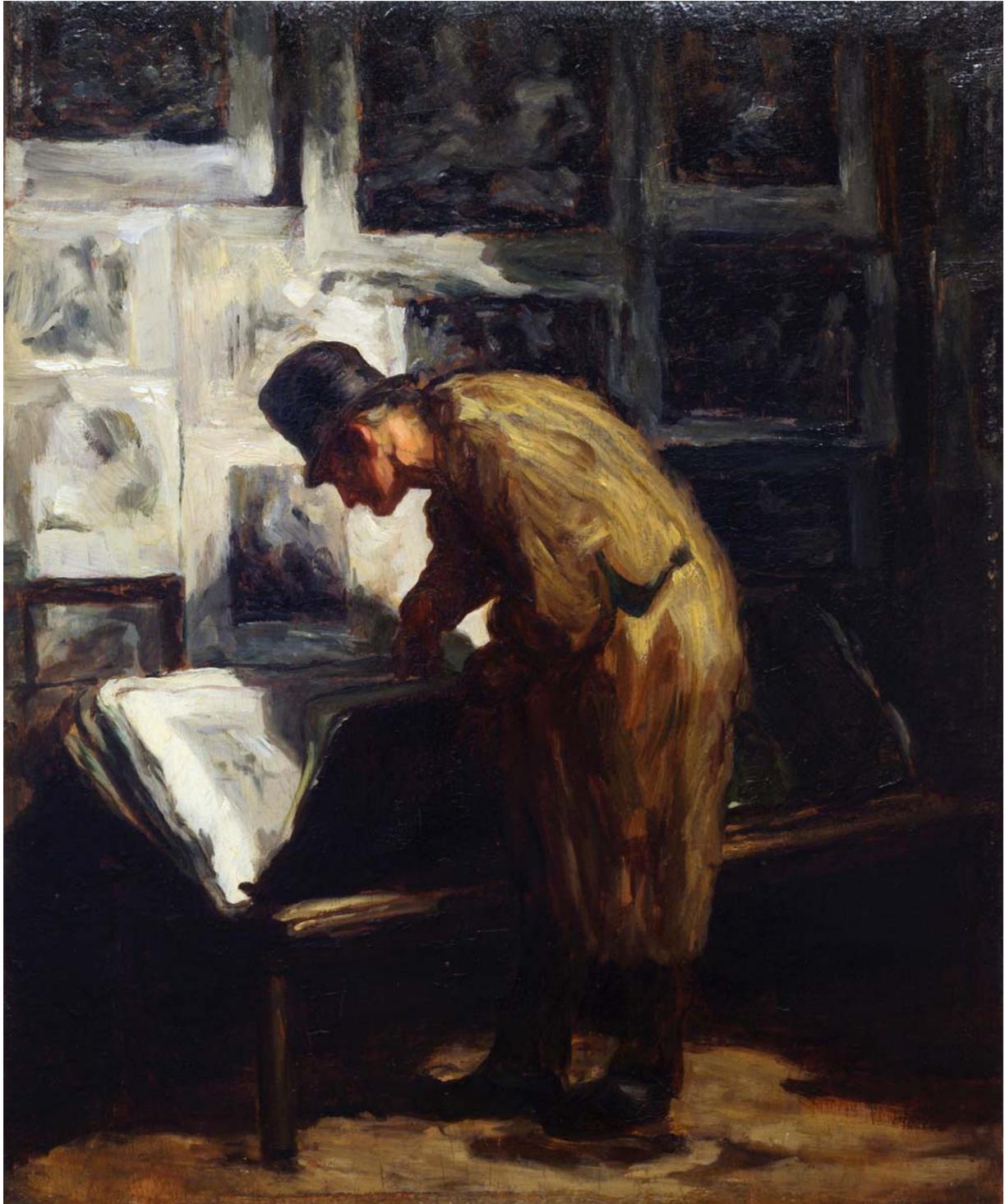


LE CLAIRE

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HONORÉ DAUMIER

1808 Marseilles - Valmondois 1879

L'Amateur d'estampes

Oil on panel, executed c.1860-2.

A fragmentary label formerly attached to the reverse of the work bears vestiges of an inscription in pen and ink signed by the painter Henri Manguin: [...] *ris 5 Juin 1925 / [...] tifie que pour moi / [...] Daumier représentant / [...] Amateur d'estampes) Manteau / [...] esse mesurant 34.7 x 24.7 / (...) bien de Daumier / H Manguin.* On a fragment of a second label inscribed by another hand in pen and ink: *Tableau acheté par moi en 1930 [...] / pendant 15 ans – (1915) – Il l'avai [...] / qui l'avait eu depuis plus de 10 a [...]*
24.7 x 30.7 cm

PROVENANCE: Dr. Albert Charpentier, Paris (1872-1953) – Thence by decent (until 2008) – Private collection, United Kingdom

The Comité Honoré Daumier has confirmed the authenticity of this painting which will be included in the forthcoming *Supplément au Catalogue Raisonné de l'Œuvre de Daumier* by Karl Eric Maison, currently in preparation.

One of the more thematically significant bodies of work in Honoré Daumier's œuvre comprises depictions of art collectors and visitors to exhibitions.¹ In the majority of his prints he approaches the subject of art appreciation from the viewpoint of a satirist commenting on the exhibitions staged at the Paris Salons. The encounter between viewer and artwork is usually depicted as a social event. In his paintings, however, he transposes the subject to a more intimate milieu, taking his examination of the relationship between the individual viewer and the artwork to a more personal level.² Daumier studied collectors and connoisseurs examining art objects at auction houses, artists' studios, galleries and private cabinets. Reviewing the only lifetime retrospective of Daumier's work, held at Galerie Durand-Ruel in the spring of 1878, Marius Vachon commended Daumier for having depicted, *with striking veracity, the many varieties of that social class: the passionate collector, the man of the world, the sceptic, the blasé collector, the man who collects for the fun of it, the ordinary collector of images.*³ Most of these works are dateable to the 1860s.

In March 1860, Charles Philipon (1800-61), the first owner of *Le Charivari*, the daily magazine dedicated to humorous content for which Daumier had been famously producing illustrations since its founding in 1832, suddenly terminated the artist's employment. The publishers claimed in an article that readers and the police had vehemently complained about the content of Daumier's work,

¹ For a discussion of Daumier's images of collectors and connoisseurs see Michael Pantazzi, 'Amateurs, années 1860', in *Daumier 1808-1879*, exhib. cat., Musée d'Orsay, Paris; Musée des Beaux-Arts du Canada, Ottawa; and The Phillips Collection, Washington 1999, pp. 394-411.

² Martin Sonnabend, 'Kunstliebhaber', in *Honoré Daumier, Zeichnungen*, exhib. cat., Frankfurt am Main, Städtische Galerie im Städelschen Kunstinstitut, Graphische Sammlung; and Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York 1992-3, p. 162.

³ *Avec une vérité étonnante, les variétés nombreuses de cette classe sociale: l'amateur passionné, l'amateur banal, l'amateur homme du monde, l'amateur sceptique, l'amateur blasé, l'amateur pour rire, enfin l'amateur populaire d'images* (Maurice Vachon, cited after Pantazzi, Washington 1999, op. cit., p. 398).

LE CLAIRE

SEIT 1982

KUNST

resulting in an alarming rise of cancelled subscriptions. The fact that Napoléon III had reinstated repressive measures against the press, and that his agents were tracking subscribers, rendering them liable to harassment, remained unmentioned. Without work, Daumier's financial situation quickly deteriorated. He turned to drawing and, for the first time in his career, devoted most of his time to painting in oils and watercolour. This move, born of necessity, eventually led to the wider appreciation of his genius, not only as a peerless practitioner of topical illustration, but as a uniquely impassioned and empathetic master of enduring fine art. Although in early 1862 Daumier resumed working in lithography and illustration, and in December 1863 was reinstated by the new editor of *Le Charivari*, he continued to broaden the scope of his art during the latter part of his career.

Apart from one minor exhibition in 1861 and the first extensive exhibition at Durand-Ruel organized by his friends to help him financially in 1878, the year before his death, Daumier's paintings were unknown to the public and remained in his studio until he died. It was not until after his death that his oils gained widespread critical recognition. In 1919, Louis Vauxcelles declared Daumier to be *first and foremost a painter. Everyone realizes this now [...]. For fifty years Daumier was thought of as a tabloid caricaturist; so he was - a magnificent one, but he was first, and above all, a painter, and always a painter.*⁴ Discussing the paintings, Michel Melot notes: *The brushwork is usually rapid and vigorous, and this, together with the sense of movement and light, ranks them with the finest paintings to be produced under the Second Empire [...]. Daumier did not prime his canvases; they are often unfinished and invariably retain a sketch-like appearance. This lack of preliminary precautions and finish gives a strong effect of spontaneity but makes the paintings fragile. Their dating is often uncertain [...]. His usual signature 'HD' has also been frequently forged, often on unsigned genuine works.*⁵

In the present painting an *amateur* of prints and drawings, still wearing his hat and coat, is depicted in an art dealer's gallery, looking through a portfolio of works on paper on a well-stocked bench. He bends down to scrutinise a sheet that appears to have suddenly caught his attention. A closer look at the brightly-lit portion of the sheet – the other half is in shadow - reveals two dancing figures. The collector is undoubtedly examining the technique and state of preservation of the work. He is almost certainly contemplating its possible authorship and attempting to identify the motif. This intense moment of absorption in every aspect of a work is at the heart of Daumier's painting. If the aesthetic pleasure and intellectual stimulus it provides prove sufficiently powerful, the enthusiastic collector will begin to reflect on the price and the extent of his own purchasing power. The way he decides is of consequence for the artist and the dealer.

The solitariness of the individual viewer contemplating the work of art comes as no surprise, as the art historian Klaus Herding has pointed out. Like the creative act of an artist working from imagination, the contemplative act of a collector 'reading' and appraising an artwork is a solitary activity.⁶ Daumier created all his paintings from his imagination. Baudelaire recognized the extraordinary depth of his inventiveness: *For him [Daumier], a model is more a hindrance than a help. We even*

⁴ *Peintre d'abord. Tout le monde le sait aujourd'hui [...]. Cinquante années durant Daumier fut tenu pour un caricaturiste de petit journal; il l'était d'ailleurs à un prodigieux degré, mais peintre d'abord, et surtout, et toujours* (Louis Vauxcelles, 12 January 1919, in an article published on the occasion of the Bureau sale, cited after Michel Melot, 'Daumier, l'art et la politique', in exhib. cat., Paris, Ottawa and Washington, 1999, op. cit., p. 64).

⁵ Michel Melot, 'Honoré Daumier' in Jane Turner (ed.), *The Dictionary of Art*, VIII, London and New York 1996, p. 546.

⁶ See Klaus Herding, 'Daumiers Bild vom Künstler und vom Kunstliebhaber', in *Honoré Daumier, Zeichnungen*, exhib. cat., Städtische Galerie im Städelschen Kunstinstitut, Graphische Sammlung, Frankfurt am Main 1992, and *The Metropolitan Museum of Art*, New York 1993, pp. 49-58.

LE CLAIRE

SEIT 1982

KUNST

see cases when men like Daumier [...], long accustomed to exercising their memory and filling it with images, see their own talent impaired and experience a form of paralysis before the model in the face of such diversity of detail.⁷ Baudelaire was often led to describe Daumier as a ‘philosopher’ since he would present his public with ideas and questions, challenging them to join in the debate. As Herding notes: *He was also interested in the exchange of ideas. That is why the collectors and the recipients play such an important role in his oeuvre. This domain was something of a refuge for him, one where he would seek his own kind and find enthusiasts appreciative of his work, friendly associates who would lessen his artistic isolation and form a special ‘lien de confiance’ with him.*⁸

Light plays a vital role in Daumier’s *oeuvre* – particularly in the present painting, where it is an indispensable vehicle for conveying the artistic message. A beam of light from a hidden source – probably an upper window – enters the image from the right. It highlights the deeply absorbed bending figure from the rear and lends his brown overcoat a soft golden gleam, spotlighting the portfolio of works in the rack and illuminating the display of sheets pinned at eye level to the wall behind. The use of directional lighting and the emphasis on a reduced palette with its focus on shades of brown, gold, grey and white recall the paintings of Rembrandt, where light is often employed in an associative sense.

The effortless virtuosity of Daumier’s rapid, freely sketched brushwork is remarkable. The fact that there is no loss of expressive clarity in his rendering of important areas of shadow such as the *amateur*’s features, and his hands as they grip the portfolio to leaf through it, evidences his extraordinary powers of observation and his rapid notational precision. Supplementary to this is his ability to achieve an astonishing degree of painterly abstraction, as in the depiction of the sheets pinned to the wall. They are executed in loose, mobile touches of greyish-white and the broad, agile brushstrokes render their motifs almost impossible to decipher. Yet the sheets are entirely convincingly portrayed – their broad margins and grisaille tone are typical attributes of drawings and prints.

The present panel is related to two drawings each depicting a sketch for the figure of the *amateur d’estampes*. The panel is also related to four oil paintings of the same subject and title. Most of them are dateable to the years 1860 to 1865. Only the oil painting, now in Chicago, was executed slightly later in circa 1863-5 [Fig. 6].

A drawing formerly in the collection of Claude Roger-Marx shows a collector standing at an open portfolio. He has a rounded, somewhat elongated back and is viewed from the side [Fig. 1]. A second drawing, formerly with Le Claire Kunst and held in a private collection in New York since 2010, shows a bearded figure wearing a high hat. He stands feet apart facing the bench. His head is more erect and his back shorter [Fig. 2]. Maison and Pantazzi regard these two drawings as preparatory studies for the paintings of the same subject.⁹

⁷ Charles Baudelaire, ‘Le peintre de la vie moderne’ (1863-68), in C. Pichois (ed.), *Œuvres complètes*, II, Paris 1976, p. 698. *Il arrive même que des hommes tels que Daumier ... , accoutumés dès longtemps à exercer leur mémoire et à la remplir d’images, trouvent devant le modèle et la multiplicité de détails qu’il comporte, leur faculté principale troublée et comme paralysée.*

⁸ Herding, Frankfurt am Main 1992, op. cit., p. 55

⁹ Karl Eric Maison, *Honoré Daumier, Catalogue Raisonné of the Paintings, Watercolours and Drawings*, London and Greenwich, CT, 1968 (reprint San Francisco 1996), II (*The Watercolours and Drawings*), p.124, nos. 364 and 365, plate CXV – Pantazzi, Paris 1999, op. cit., p. 396.

The first of the four paintings is an oil sketch on panel formerly in a private collection in New Orleans [Fig. 3].¹⁰ It depicts a darkish room, its walls closely hung with paintings in gold frames and lined with pinned-up works on paper. The collector's back is rounded, his feet are large and his overcoat is greyish-violet in tone. It is generally agreed that this sketch was executed around 1860, before the unfinished oil study on panel held in the Philadelphia Museum of Art [Fig. 4].¹¹ The Philadelphia study depicts a more brightly-lit interior. The only objects on the wall are pinned-up works on paper, one of which is a sheet in sanguine glimpsed at the extreme left. At the right of the bench is a bluish-green portfolio. In this study the collector's back is also rounded and the position of his feet almost identical, although here they are smaller. Pantazzi has noted, however, that *the unfinished Philadelphia oil displays signs of a significant pentimento around the head of the figure and another on the figure's back, suggesting that it was originally less rounded and the figure therefore diverged from the figure in the New Orleans sketch.*¹²

The third version, a highly-finished oil on canvas, is preserved in the Petit Palais - Musée des Beaux-Arts de la Ville de Paris [Fig. 5]. It depicts an elegant collector dressed in black, half turned towards the viewer. Like the bearded figure in the New York drawing [Fig. 2], he has a rolled sheet tucked into his pocket. Here too, the gallery wall is lined exclusively with works on paper, with a single sheet in sanguine.

A later version of the motif is also recorded. Dateable to circa 1863-5, this is an oil on panel now held in the Art Institute of Chicago [Fig. 6]. It too depicts a partially-lit gallery interior. However the figure of the collector is shown in a tense upright stance, hands in pockets. His body language belies inner conflict as he gazes at a directly-lit female portrait in sanguine prominently pinned to the wall.

The present panel can be fairly clearly situated within the sequence of the group described above. The first painted version of the motif is unquestionably the New Orleans oil sketch [Fig. 3] and the final version, the panel now in Chicago [Fig. 6]. The present panel was almost certainly executed not long after the New Orleans oil sketch, but before the unfinished panel in Philadelphia [Fig. 4], therefore making it the second version in the group.

While in the present panel the pose of the figure is based almost entirely on the New Orleans oil sketch, there is a highly important, entirely new emphasis on light. It is used with maximum expressive impact, illuminating the collector's overcoat with a golden gleam and highlighting the sheets pinned to the wall (they replace the gold-framed paintings of the New Orleans oil sketch). Their brilliant whiteness offsets the silhouette of the head to masterly chiaroscuro effect. All other objects remain in darkness, untouched by the beam of light. The eye is directed towards the figure, intensifying its physical presence.

Assuming that Daumier continually invented and developed fresh pictorial ideas as the series of five works evolved, it seems reasonable to surmise that the unfinished, Philadelphia version of the *Amateur d'estampes* [Fig. 4] was not executed until after the present panel. Daumier reworked the figure of the

¹⁰ Maison, op. cit., I, p.123 f., nos. I-135, I-136 and I-137.

¹¹ 'Sketch for the two paintings I-136 and 137, in Philadelphia and in the Petit Palais, Paris, respectively' (Id., I-135).

¹² *L'œuvre de Philadelphie possède toutefois un important repentir autour de la tête du personnage ainsi qu'un deuxième tracé au niveau du dos, indiquant qu'à l'origine le personnage n'était pas aussi voûté et s'écartait donc de la figure de l'esquisse.* (Pantazzi, op. cit., p. 396).

collector in the Philadelphia version after abandoning a clearly unsatisfactory attempt to straighten the figure's back. He overpainted certain areas to return to the rounded form he had given it both in the New Orleans oil sketch and the present panel. At the same time, he reduced the size of the rather over-large feet to make the figure appear more elegant. The size of the feet is retained in the later versions. The sheet in sanguine at the left edge of the image first appears in the unfinished Philadelphia panel and recurs in a similar position in the slightly later Petit Palais version [Fig. 5]. In the Chicago panel [Fig. 6] it is given greater prominence. However, in the Philadelphia panel Daumier dispenses with the chiaroscuro effect and the handling of light is considerably broader than in the present panel. A further difference between the two panels is the appearance in the Philadelphia version of a new coloristic accent provided by a bluish-green portfolio at the right. The motif recurs in the Petit Palais canvas and again in the Chicago panel, where it occupies a more prominent foreground position.

It is not inconceivable that the second [Fig. 2] of the two preparatory studies represents an attempt by Daumier to alter his portrayal of the collector after abandoning work on the Philadelphia panel. Consequently, the completed Petit Palais canvas [Fig. 5] could be seen as the product of this endeavour. Parallels between the Paris canvas and the preparatory drawing are undeniable and outweigh any differences. Therefore – and in view of its stylistic proximity to the Chicago panel [Fig. 6] of 1863-5 – the Petit Palais canvas should be regarded as fourth in the order of execution within the group.

The present panel offers a valuable contribution to an understanding of the development of one of Daumier's most attractive subjects and as such, would represent a significant addition to a leading private or institutional collection.



Fig. 1: *L'Amateur d'estampes*, c.1860, crayon, 33.6 x 26.2 cm. Formerly Claude Roger-Marx, Paris. (Maison D 364)



Fig. 2: *L'Amateur d'estampes*, c.1860-2, pencil, crayon and charcoal, 36.4 x 29.2 mm. Private collection, New York; acquired from Le Claire Kunst in 2010 (Maison D 365)



Fig. 3: *L'Amateur d'estampes* (sketch), c.1860, oil on panel, unsigned, 21 x 16.5 cm. Formerly private collection, New Orleans. (Maison I-135)



Fig. 4: *L'Amateur d'estampes* (unfinished), c.1860-2, oil on panel, monogrammed, 35 x 26 cm. Philadelphia Museum of Art. (Maison I-136)



Fig. 5: *L'Amateur d'estampes*, c.1860-2,
oil on canvas, signed, 40 x 32 cm.
Petit Palais - Musée des Beaux-Arts de la Ville de
Paris. (Maison I-137)

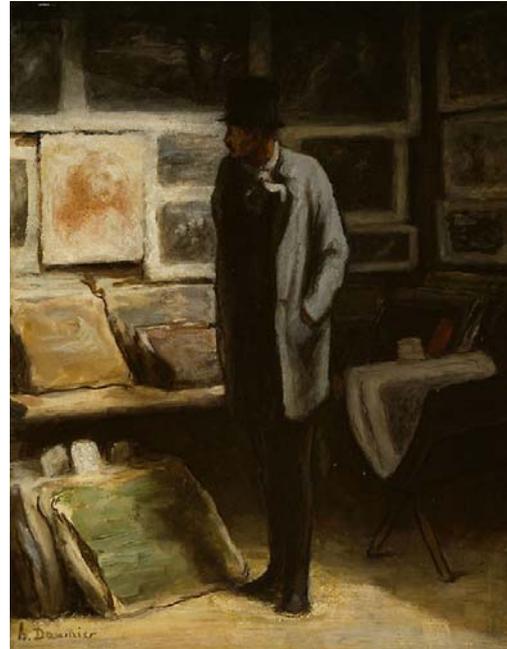


Fig. 6: *L'Amateur d'estampes*, c.1863-5,
oil on panel, 40.2 x 33 cm.
The Art Institute of Chicago.
(Maison I-152)